

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

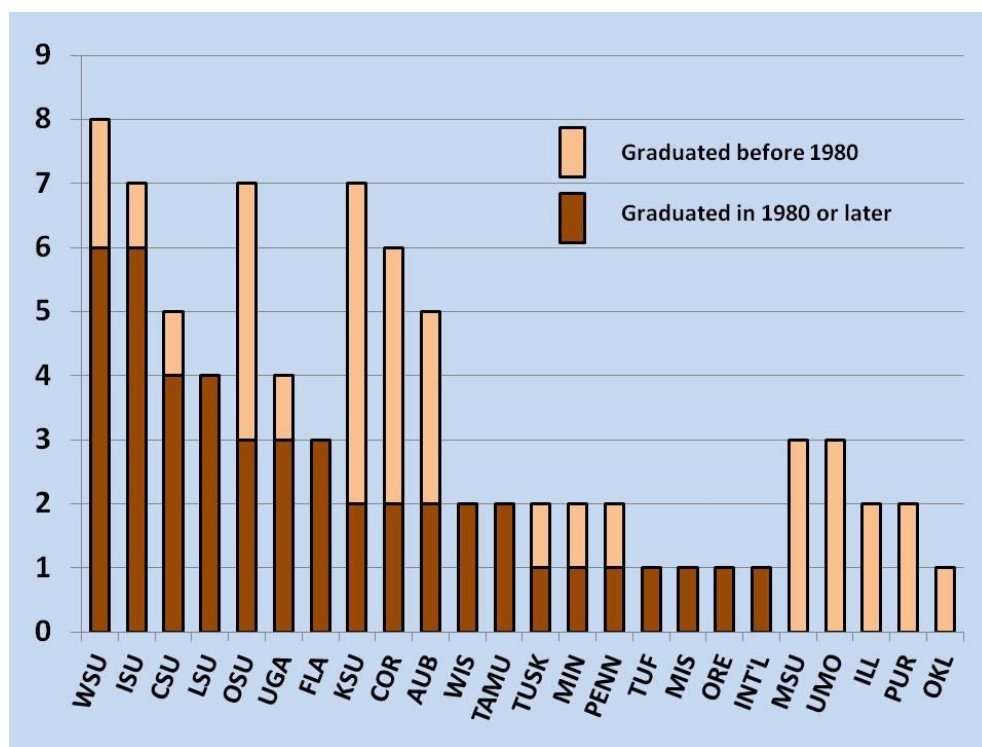
# Veterinary Leadership in Iowa

By Dr. Donald F. Smith and Julie Kumble

December 12, 2013

In the middle of wide corn fields, amid pig farms, and between vast, flat stretches of land, Iowa State University (ISU) in Ames is home to the first state-supported veterinary college in the country. It implemented the first three-year (1887) and four-year (1902) veterinary curricula, and was the first college (1926) to require a year of undergraduate education before acceptance into the DVM program.<sup>1</sup> Ames is also home to the USDA National Animal Disease Center and has one of the highest ratios of veterinarians per capita in the country.<sup>2</sup>

Iowa also ranks first in leadership in organized veterinary medicine. In a story posted here on November 5, 2013, we documented the large number of ISU alumni who are voting members on the AVMA's Executive Board (EB) and in the House of Delegates (HOD).<sup>3</sup>



AVMA Leadership (Executive Board and House of Delegates voting members)  
by College and Year of Graduation.<sup>4</sup>

A follow-up story on November 7 also showed that the ISU alumnae represent the largest proportion of women in voting positions in these bodies of any US veterinary college.<sup>5</sup> Not only

do ISU graduates represent strength in women's leadership, but the following graph shows a parallel impact for younger veterinarians using years since graduation as a rough proxy for age. Six of ISU's seven voting members of the AVMA's EB and HOD (2013-14) graduated in 1980 or later.

When you talk to Iowa veterinarians and veterinary students, they will also refer to leadership in a wider sense—as a sense of community leadership. “We are often among the best-educated professionals in our communities,” says Dr. Tom Johnson, Executive Director of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association (IVMA), “so it is important that we serve in organized veterinary medicine, and/or in our local communities as civic, public health, or church officers. As educated professionals, we have an obligation to contribute to the welfare and betterment of society.”<sup>6</sup>

This ethic of giving back permeates Iowa State University veterinary students, five of whom we interviewed in a recent visit to the university.<sup>7</sup> One second-year student summarized it this way,

*Being a leader means being a leader in the community as well as in the profession; it means being a well-rounded person. You can be in the AVMA and all of the available leadership positions available, and in state and community positions.*

A third-year student added,

*It means leading in whatever area you are, initiating the work in your area. I think of leadership in a very broad sense. It is first and foremost giving back to the community. In the context of the State VMA, it means giving back.*

Another student explained what she meant by the concept of *servant leader*.

*This was a concept introduced and emphasized at our first-year orientation here at ISU, and it is used at the Veterinary Leadership Institute.<sup>8</sup> To me the concept of servant leader is at the cornerstone of my leadership practices, and I believe it harbors a [transformative] power to future and present leaders. People want to follow that and be a part of that, and I truly believe these are the leaders who make a difference for those around them. It is all about knowing yourself and where you can best make a difference for your community.*

Despite the fact that 70% of ISU graduates reside outside the state, almost 1,150 of the 1,450 veterinarians in Iowa are graduates of the state university.<sup>9</sup> Because of this, the veterinary association and the university in Ames have always enjoyed a close and synergistic relationship.

Dr. Johnson, a 1971 graduate of ISU, says this leadership profile didn't "just happen." Rather, he told us that the IVMA has been working for over a decade, often in conjunction with ISU, to develop leadership skills and opportunities for women and for younger veterinarians.<sup>10</sup>



Tom Johnson, DVM (ISU '71)  
Executive Director, Iowa Veterinary Medical Association  
(Photo by Julie Kumble, 2013)

Dr. Johnson believes that organized veterinary medicine holds the key to where the profession is going.<sup>11</sup>

*And if the profession is no longer old grey-haired guys, then old grey-haired guys cannot be leading the profession. Our association recognized several years ago that we need young people in our organization. Because of today's demographics, that means they are now going to be females.*

To address this need for change, the association developed a two-pronged strategy. One was to make substantive structural changes in the IVMA, and the other was to develop leadership training opportunities for young veterinarians.

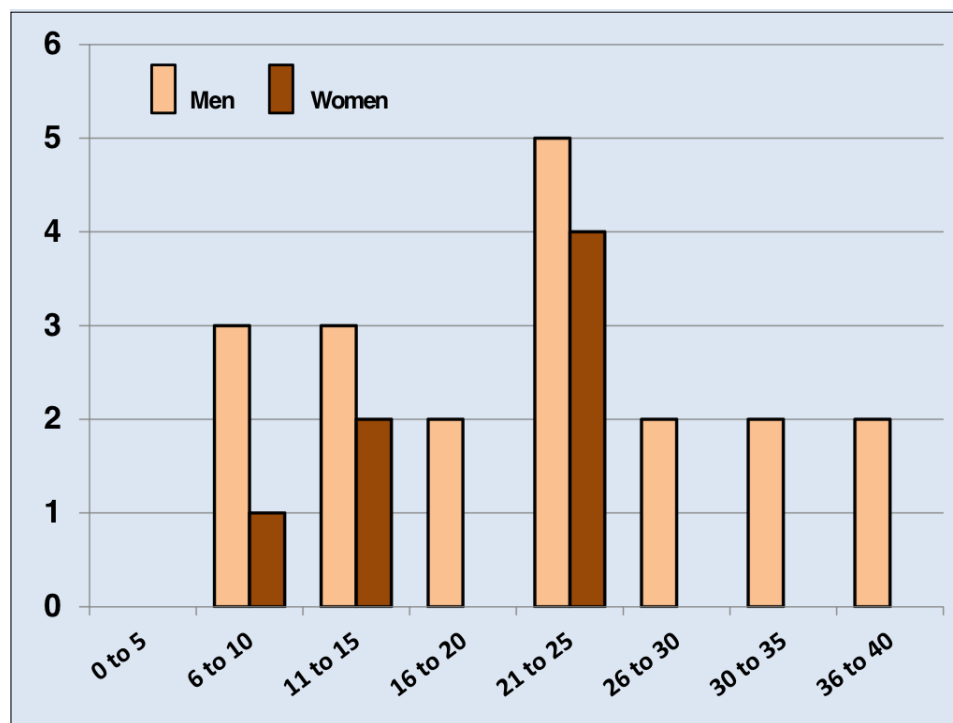
Structurally, they confronted the prevailing dogma that leadership required progressively more challenging appointments, moving sequentially from regional leadership to becoming one of the 22 IVMA directors, to one of the four officers,<sup>12</sup> to AVMA HOD alternate and then delegate. Rather, their leaders for director, officer, and HOD positions were drawn from parallel pools of candidates, so they didn't have to move from one pool of qualified candidates to the next, and so on.

Though there are no term limits for the directors who represent the State's geographic regions, the officer positions are limited to one year each, and the HOD members have four-year terms as both alternate and delegate. This opens up further opportunities for more members.

Because officers are not usually drawn from the pool of directors who have had leadership experience in the association, a period of formal training and mentoring has been developed to prepare them for their responsibilities. The development of parallel leadership opportunities widens the pool for leadership within the state. This better accommodates those veterinarians who, for either personal or financial reasons, have only "so many years to give organized veterinary medicine"<sup>13</sup> yet they have much to offer and are willing and eager to participate.

Johnson estimates the average practitioner sacrifices \$1,500 of practice income for every day spent in association activities. To encourage young veterinarians to participate in the Power of 10 leadership program, attend a regional leadership program, and attend the AVMA Veterinary Leadership Conference, the IVMA pays recent graduates for their expenses associated with attendance at those meetings.

The following graph shows the distribution of IVMA directors and officers for 2013, segmented by gender and year of graduation. Though the number of women directors does not break the 30% threshold that we have reported elsewhere as the minimum for adequate representation,<sup>14</sup> the proportion of women in officer positions has been 50% in three of the last four years.



*Number of men and women officers and directors in the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association during 2013-14, segmented by number of years since DVM graduation.*

(Data provided by Dr. Tom Johnson, Exec Dir IVMA, 2013.)

This gender equity is achieved using a nomination committee for elections. Candidates are selected by the nominating committee and one candidate is presented on the ballot to the membership for a vote. The candidate advanced by the nominating committee for vote is selected for diversity of professional activity, to achieve gender equality, and to promote younger veterinarians to leadership positions over time.

Johnson noted that to help stimulate the interest of young veterinarians in future leadership roles, the IVMA developed a summer internship program for students who have finished their second year of veterinary college.<sup>15</sup>

*By getting students involved, they get to know the association and its leaders, and they not only develop their own skills and commitment, but they go back to the university and influence their classmates to also consider the benefits of working in organized veterinary medicine.*

Johnson's experience with self-nomination suggests very few veterinarians are likely to step forward to volunteer for a leadership positions in the Association. "I've never had a member contact me to volunteer to run for office," he says. "When you call people and ask them to consider leadership positions they are surprised and usually accept. If they don't accept they explain why, and we set a date in the future that might work better for them to serve the profession in this capacity."

Women broke into leadership in 2002 when the IVMA elected its first woman president. That was the first year Dr. Johnson was executive director of the Association.

When asked if Iowa's structural changes and leadership development programs aimed at involving a younger and more diverse group of veterinary leaders might be applicable at the national level for senior AVMA leadership positions, Johnson's reaction was simple.

"Why not?" he said.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Veterinary Medical Education 1872-2007. 135 Years of Progress. Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine. Pages 8-10, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, DF and MS Fenn. 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Veterinary Education and the Veterinary Profession in North America: Part 4, US Veterinary Colleges in 2011 and the Distribution of their Graduates. J Vet Med Educ 38(4), 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Donald F. Diversity of Educational Background in the AVMA Leadership (2013-14). *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. Nov. 5, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> American Veterinary Medical Association, November 23, 2013 (available to AVMA members only)

<sup>5</sup> Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. AVMA Leadership by Gender and College of Graduation. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. Nov. 7, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, Tom, DVM ISU '71, (Executive Director, Iowa Veterinary Medical Association. Interview with Julie Kumble (Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts) and Donald Smith (Cornell University) at Iowa State University. Nov 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

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<sup>7</sup> Five Iowa State University Veterinary Medical Students (names withheld in compliance with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Interview with Julie Kumble (Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts) and Donald Smith (Cornell University). Iowa State University, November 18, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> The Veterinary Leadership Institute is a program of the AVMA and was attended by this student.

<sup>9</sup> AVMA data, November 22, 2013

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, Tom. See reference 6, above.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The four officer positions are president, president-elect, immediate past president and vice president.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, Tom. See reference 6, above.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. Women's Leadership in the U.S. Congress and the AVMA's House of Delegates: Exploring Parallels and Moving Forward. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. [www.VeritasDVMBlog.com](http://www.VeritasDVMBlog.com). April 28, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, Tom. See reference 6, above.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

#### KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine  
American Veterinary Medical Association  
Iowa Veterinary Medical Association  
Tom Jay Johnson  
Women in Veterinary Medicine  
Iowa State University  
House of Delegates  
Executive Board  
National Animal Disease Center  
Leadership in Veterinary Medicine  
Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine

#### TOPIC:

Leadership in Veterinary Medicine

#### LEADING QUESTION:

What State is known for its programs in developing leaders in veterinary medicine?

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

**Dr. Donald F. Smith**, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National

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Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.

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